



Pride Foundation

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Bill No. SB 179

Good Morning Chairman Sales and Members of the Committee;

My name is Kim Leighton and I am here today to express my strong support of SB179 and updating the Montana Human Rights Act to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people from discrimination.

I am a Montana resident, a member of the LGBTQ community, and the Regional Development Organizer for Pride Foundation—a regional community foundation focused on expanding opportunities and advancing full equality for LGBTQ people across the Northwest.

It is currently legal in Montana to fire someone or deny them housing because of their sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.

All hardworking people—including those who are gay or transgender—should be treated fairly and equally by the laws of our state, and should have the opportunity to earn a living to provide for themselves and their families. Protecting people from discrimination is about treating others the way we want to be treated, and treating everyone in our state with dignity and respect.

Equality is also good for business. That is why 88 percent of Fortune 500 companies prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and nearly six-in-ten prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. Updating the Montana Human Rights Act would allow our state to retain the best and brightest in the workforce, boosting worker productivity and the economy. It allows individuals to be judged on the merits of their job performance and qualifications, nothing more, nothing less.

I want to close on a more personal note. Over the years I have met countless LGBTQ individuals and families in Montana that have experienced harassment, discrimination, and hatred. The fear that many in our community feel is overwhelming and I have come face to face with what this looks and feels like. I travel all over Montana for work and I cannot stress enough how important it is that Montanans feel safe everywhere. I want to know that when I go to a city for work or travel, I will have the same security and safety that I have when I am in Helena, Missoula, Butte or Bozeman; where local non-discrimination ordinances have already passed.

With your action, we can protect all Montana families and ensure that we stand on the right side of history. Thank you for your time.